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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000584

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TAGS: PREL KPAL BA REGION

SUBJECT: FORMIN CRITICIZES QATAR'S ROLE AT ARAB LEAGUE MEETING ON PALESTINIANS

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa told the Ambassador June 21 that while the planned multilateral meeting on the Palestinian situation in Egypt on June 24 was a "really good start," the Arab League meeting held in Cairo June 15 did not go well. He particularly cited Qatar's role as being problematic. Observing that Qatar could be a successful partner for peace with its wealth and position, he lamented that at the Cairo meeting, it associated itself with Syria and Hamas. Qatar, Shaikh Khalid said, is two-faced; it engages with both Israel and Syria. Responsible countries have one face.

¶2. (C) Shaikh Khalid said he was very clear in his intervention that Palestinian Deputy PM Azzam Al Ahmad, who participated in the meeting, did so on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas, not Fatah. The Syrian ForMin insisted that Hamas' view be heard as well. Shaikh Khalid replied by stating that while Fatah and Hamas have a dispute, the Arab League had gathered to support President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority. The Qatari ForMin interjected that it was not fair for the Arab League to recognize only one side.

¶3. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about the GCC's reaction to Qatar's role, Shaikh Khalid said that if other Arab countries had supported Abbas more strongly, Syria and Qatar would not have been able to be advocates for Hamas. Egypt and Jordan, he said, both made statements in support of Abbas but did not get much involved in negotiations over the wording of the communique. He complained that Saudi Arabia dealt with the communique as if it were a fatwa, considering nuances rather than viewing it as a political statement. U.S. actions to support Abbas and provide the PA with financial assistance were "the right thing to do," and he was happy that Israel also released funds to Abbas. These measures should improve conditions in the West Bank.

¶4. (C) The immediate challenge, in Shaikh Khalid's view, is to "fine-tune" the Saudi position, which so far is unclear. Saudi Arabia has to find a way to disassociate itself from the Mecca Agreement because it gives Hamas legitimacy. The Saudi government "probably feels it's stuck with it (the agreement)," but it should walk away from the agreement because the Palestinian unity government that signed the agreement no longer exists. In response to the Ambassador's request, Shaikh Khalid agreed that the Bahraini Cabinet should issue a public statement of support for Abbas at its June 24 meeting.

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